

**Potrero Hill Democratic Club
Board of Education Candidate Forum
Tuesday, September 13, 2022
Potrero Hill Neighborhood House**

Candidate Questionnaire

Candidate name: Lainie Motamedi
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*Please write a brief response (up to 200 words) to each question. **Please email the completed questionnaire to [contact us@phdemclub.org](mailto:contact_us@phdemclub.org) by Monday, September 5.** The questionnaires will be made available online to club members.*

If elected, what are your top 3 goals for SFUSD? Specifically, how do you plan to accomplish these goals?

My top priorities are

1. Focus on student success
2. Fiscal responsibility,
3. Engaging with students, families, educators, and the community at large.

In the last five months since taking office, I've been working hard to move these priorities forward. We've hired a new superintendent, approved a balanced budget, committed to in-person instruction for our students, embarked upon a process to improve all high schools, stopped using facilities bond money to appeal a lawsuit the previous board lost, and are working with our city partners to share resources and shore up financial support.

Over my time in the district, I have visited over 35 schools and talked with countless educators and site administrators about their experiences and needs. I have continued to engage with our district leadership to ensure that our financial decisions are sound and I have worked collaboratively with our Dept of Education colleagues to ensure we are headed in the right direction. I have met with numerous parents and community groups who are invested in our student success.

In short, I am deeply committed to ensuring that our district is run and managed for the benefit and educational success of our students. This is an all hands on deck effort as the problems we see didn't happen overnight. This will take sustained and supported collective effort to focus on our students and the resources, skills, and experiences they need to be successful.

What are the specific skills/expertise that you have that you think will help you achieve these goals?

I'm a parent with a decade of engagement in school sites and the District - including PTA and School Site Council leadership. At the District level, I served a four-year term, including as co-chair, on the Public Education Enrichment Fund Committee. While on the PEEF CAC, I advocated for accountability and transparency reform to ensure that San Francisco City funds are utilized for student benefit as mandated by the City Charter. In this role, I also reviewed SFUSD programming, advised the Board of Education, and provided recommendations to best

serve our students. In addition, I actively participated in the District's Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) Task Force.

I have over twenty years professional experience in state government, business, and nonprofits. I grew up in Los Angeles, where my mom and stepfather were teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District – serving for a combined 56 years. And I'm the daughter of an immigrant. My father moved to San Francisco from Iran when he was 17. California's public education system enabled him to learn English and achieve his professional aspirations.

A more complete bio is here: www.lainieforsfboe.com/bio

If you are an incumbent, please tell us what you are most proud of. If you are the challenger, describe something the incumbent(s) did that you would have done differently.

1. Hired a new superintendent who has hit the ground running and is actively going into community to get feedback and develop partnership,
2. Approved a balanced budget and rescinded teacher layoff notices,
3. Committed to in-person instruction for our students,
4. Embarked upon a process to improve all high schools,
5. Stopped using facilities bond money to appeal a lawsuit the previous board lost,
6. Developed a plan to address the payroll issues that I inherited as a board member,
7. Working with our city partners to share resources and shore up financial support,
8. Embarked on a comprehensive process to develop clear student and district priorities, and
9. Chaired an ad hoc committee to advance policy changes and refocus the Board's work on student success.

Families Abandoning SFUSD: Do you believe SFUSD should be doing more to attract and retain families who have alternative options to SFUSD and why? What do you believe SFUSD is not doing now and could be doing differently to attract or retain these families?

SFUSD does not have a clear baseline of programs, courses, or services that every student will receive at every site. For instance, SFUSD stopped publishing a high school course catalog in 2014 and has declined public requests to do so. In addition, its school webpages are not kept regularly up to date. This lack of information, coupled with a citywide lottery for high schools (no neighborhood preference) creates a tremendous lack of transparency and uncertainty for our secondary students. As a student or family member, it is very difficult to navigate the system and understand what will be offered, where, and for which students - or which school site a student will be assigned to attend. This has led to divestment for many families, and frustration for many others. While co-chairing the Public Education Enrichment Fund advisory committee, I helped lead unanimous recommendations requesting this information. As a commissioner, I am continuing to advocate for this basic information to be transparent and shared publicly.

We need excellent educational opportunities for all of our students at all of our school sites. Currently, we see huge gaps in student success for many of our student populations and at many of our school sites. All of our students should be progressing at grade level or above in literacy and math, all of our students should have access to tutoring and educational and wellness support and advanced learning opportunities.

In addition, all of our students should have access to enrichment, elective, and sports opportunities. SFUSD currently does not have clear commitments about what all of our students will experience at all of our sites. Other large districts provide this information and commit with transparency, we need to do the same. Our students have the aspiration, aptitude, and ability. The fact that only 53% of our 8th graders are high school ready by the District's own assessment reflects failures of the system, not our students.

SFUSD needs to reorient itself to be in service to students and families if we want to maintain and increase enrollment.

School Assignment System: What role should the Board of Education play in the changes planned for elementary school assignment? What metrics would define the new system as a success?

As a parent, I have found the current enrollment system confusing, ineffective, discouraging, demotivating, and ineffective at addressing the equity issues it purportedly is designed to address. The system requires a significant amount of time, resources, and bureaucratic understanding for families to navigate. In addition, it requires a lot of district overhead to administer, communicate, and manage.

In addition, our enrollment system is different for elementary, middle, and high school processes. So at each step in the system, our students and families must learn and go through a new process.

Below are the areas that I believe need to inform our enrollment to retain and attract families:

Clear commitments at all schools. We need to clearly and broadly communicate what is offered to students at *all* schools in our district. Likewise we need to invest in programming that is attractive to our students and families, including consistent and coherent pathways.

Reduce uncertainty regarding enrollment. Our enrollment system needs to reflect student and family priorities. I hear too often that the complexity and uncertainty baked into our enrollment systems have led to families divesting from our system or otherwise adversely affecting their confidence in our district.

Improve outcomes at all schools. The district needs to deliver on its educational promises and show positive outcomes at *all* school sites so that families have confidence that their children will be set up for success. Our schools need to have parity in offerings and need to have access to the same level of resources. That does not mean that all schools should be the same. ALL neighborhoods and communities must have schools that they are proud of and wish to attend.

Middle School Redesign: Has this initiative been successful? What resources, plans or changes for our middle schools would you advocate for on the school board, if elected?

Middle School Redesign was another top down initiative with laudable goals and very little connection to the reality of our school sites. It's been over a decade and central office still has

not created a process or opportunity for our middle school communities to provide feedback or suggestions about what is actually needed. Rather than listening, SFUSD central office has repackaged Middle School Redesign as a central office project called "Initiate Wonder" that continues to push mandates into our middle schools that are disconnected from student and educator needs.

Our middle schools have been overlooked and under-resourced.

This last academic year 2021-22, about 50% of our eighth grade graduates were designated by the district as not prepared for high school. We have been burdening our middle schools with central office created initiatives that do not serve our students or educators. Start time changes, mandating advisory periods without structure or support, pushing block period restructuring without commensurate resources or educator support and prep time, all while our school communities are working to respond to the immediate needs of our students, have led to low morale and friction between our educator staff and administration with no proven benefit to students.

SFUSD needs to interrupt its top down decision making approach and instead needs to operate in service of its students and school sites. Our middle schools know what they need - but they've never been asked in the decade I've been engaged with the district. I am working hard to bring student success to the center of decision making - and to gather input from students, families, educators, and school sites as integral to that effort.

High Schools: What resources, plans or changes for our high schools would you advocate for on the school board, if elected? Please weigh in but do not limit your answer to Lowell.

As with our middle schools, we need transparency regarding what we are offering at all of our high schools and community input into what our students, families, and educators recommend going forward. We need transparency and clear commitments and support for career and college pathways, enrichment programs, and athletics. And we need transparency about how we are supporting our students and educators to ensure our children's success. I am pleased that my colleagues and I voted 7-0 to direct the Superintendent to examine, investigate, and evaluate our high school portfolio for the purpose of improving all of our high school programs. These recommendations are due to the board by April, 2023 so we can begin making necessary investments to improve our students' opportunity for success.

Opportunity / Achievement Gap: Please name one SFUSD strategy at closing the opportunity / achievement gap that has failed and explain why and one strategy that has either succeeded or has the potential to succeed and explain why.

I am very concerned about the opportunity gaps for our historically underserved students, and I am especially troubled by the high-level systemic policy issues that are flying under the radar and worsening racial disparities in access.

My experience in government program management has given me insight into how these inequities can embed and multiply racial inequities. For example, one of the most dangerously inequitable ways in which SFUSD is failing on equity is in being transparent about its different

schools' distinct program offerings. Unlike other districts, SFUSD publishes very little information about our schools -- for instance, SFUSD has not published a course catalog for high schools since 2014!

Why does this matter for equity? Because it creates stubborn and systemic inequities that have ripple effects on student access & opportunities. If families can't easily find out what course offerings, enrichment programs, athletics, college/career pathways, or academic counselors are available at their current school or at a school they are considering, how can they make informed choices about where they want to enroll their student?

This is an area in which SFUSD's current system is set up to pay lip service to equity while blocking families and educators from getting the real and meaningful information they need to access opportunities for their children. Those families who have a contact on the inside are able to get better information than those families who do not. This inequitable access to information needs to stop.

SFUSD needs to be transparent & current about every school's programs and we need community input into what else our students, families, and educators recommend going forward. SFUSD's failure to provide this most basic information to families makes our school choice process inequitable.

We should learn from, highlight, and expand the successes at our schools, like Mission High. I am pleased that my colleagues and I voted 7-0 to direct the Superintendent to examine, investigate, and evaluate our high school portfolio for the purpose of improving all of our high school programs. These recommendations are due to the board by April, 2023 so we can begin making necessary investments to improve our students' opportunity for success.

SFUSD has not regularly shared what is working for our focal students academically and in creating a sense of belonging at our schools. I have visited schools such as BVHM and John Muir and seen firsthand the work these administrators, educators, and partners are doing to close opportunity gaps. The benefits of culturally responsive teaching and family involvement are clear.

John Muir's innovative math curriculum and instruction program led to very positive improvements for students. In addition, it has shown a track record of being significantly more successful in ELA proficiency as well. However, rather than the District championing or uplifting this success, supporters had to work with the City to find funding. Innovation and success needs to be supported by the District.

We need to shine a light on what is working and expand those efforts. We need to build greater confidence in families that the district is delivering on its educational promises and showing positive outcomes at all schools. All schools should not be the same, but they should each deliver positive outcomes.

I've also been looking at other similarly sized districts, such as Long Beach Unified, that have much smaller opportunity gaps than SFUSD. What are they doing differently? And how are they achieving positive learning outcomes for their students?

I am very supportive of the community schools models to serve our students. I look forward to expanding this work thanks to additional state funding, and hopefully even more so through the

Student Success Fund (Prop G) as well. I would like to see ALL neighborhoods and communities have schools they are proud of and wish to attend.

Teacher Retention: How has the Board of Education failed SFUSD teachers and what can it do to support and retain them?

Pay increases for our educators should not be an afterthought. We need to bring the whole SFUSD step-and-column closer to the levels of other Bay Area districts, and we need to continuously plan for pay increases. Paras in particular need a big raise and they need to be integrated into PERS or whatever the appropriate retirement system is for them. We can't recruit or retain teachers if we don't pay a comparable wage.

We should also be considering stipends for MA and PhD, rather than just for National Board Certification. I understand that this is another pay-based reason why our educators leave.

I have been consistently vocal about my expectation that our district planning needs to include and anticipate educator pay and COLA increases, and reflect comparable wages. My understanding is that this district has not been doing that as a norm for many years. The budget forecasts that I inherited as a new board member, do not anticipate much needed increases. This is out of step with our City's norms for labor relations and ought to be remedied.

I also believe recruitment and retention of our educators is essential to our success as a school district. Stable schools and districts are able to improve processes and serve students and families better. I would like to learn more about sabbaticals, prep time allowances, and other ways to support our educators through pay and planning time.

Our core mission as a district is to educate our students. In order to do so effectively, we need to support our educators, paras, and others who provide direct service to our students. Central office needs to operate in service and partnership with our students and our educators. The District's current approach is counterproductive and obstructive.

Describe your views on the role of charter schools in San Francisco. Do you support an equitable allocation of resources to charter schools relative to district schools - why or why not?

My focus on this board is to ensure that SFUSD is carrying out its oversight role so that all students receive a world-class education along with the support they need to fulfill their aspirations and be well-prepared as they graduate.

Budget: What allocations in the current budget are higher/lower than needed and why? Please describe your current or previous experience with budgetary oversight.

At the District level, I served a four-year term, including as co-chair, on the Public Education Enrichment Fund Committee which provides input on \$80 million of City funds provided to the

District annually. While on the PEEF CAC, I advocated for accountability and transparency reform to ensure that San Francisco City funds are utilized for student benefit as mandated by the City Charter. In this role, I also reviewed SFUSD programming, advised the Board of Education, and provided recommendations to best serve our students. In addition, I actively participated in the District's Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) Task Force. In these capacities, I was astounded to observe the lack of district ownership or transparency regarding budgeting practices and student priorities.

Every CA school district is required to submit a three year student and budget plan to the CA Dept of Education, and report on progress annually. This is called the LCAP.

Throughout the year, each school's School Site Council (principals, teachers, families, students, and other school site staff) develops a plan for student achievement, the site budget, and monitors progress on student success. The school site plans collectively are supposed to inform district priorities and decision-making. In addition, the community broadly is supposed to have the opportunity to provide input and hear updates on the plan and process.

Normally, a city district has to submit its plan to the county office for review. Because we are a city *and* a county, we bypass that oversight step.

For years, SFUSD has declined to meaningfully engage our school sites and families in this process. The result has been a lack of school site voice and top-down decision making from the District. In many years, no members of the public have been given the opportunity to see even a draft LCAP prior to its completion, or give input in any meaningful way.

I am working to change this as I believe in good governance. Those who know our students best should have opportunities to inform decision-making and see their voice and feedback reflected in student priorities, student success plans and results, and budget alignment.

Prior to my joining the board, I had already been in contact with the CA Dept of Ed and FCMAT to seek guidance as to how to improve our process to meet the intent of the LCAP. As a Commissioner, the LCAP is an area of primary importance to me and I am continuing to advocate and work to bring others along so we can do this work for our students and to strengthen the voice and support of educators within our decision-making. As PEEF CAC co-chair and now as a Boardmember, my voice and advocacy on this matter has been consistent and loud.

Thank you for taking the time to fill this out, and thanks for running!